

James Case
CWA Local 1298
Labor & Public Employees Committee Public Hearing
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SB 938 AN ACT CONCERNING UNEMPLOYMENT FOR STRIKING WORKERS

Good afternoon, Senator Kushner, Representative Sanchez, Senator Sampson, Representative Ackert, and the distinguished members of the Labor & Public Employees Committee. My name is James Case, I live in Wethersfield and I'm here on behalf of the proud members of CWA Local 1298, representing workers for Frontier and AT&T in the State of Connecticut. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of SB 938.

Connecticut workers who go on strike are unable to collect unemployment benefits as they are presumed to have left their jobs voluntarily. This is an extremely difficult choice because workers risk a loss of income, the permanent loss of their jobs, especially when replacement workers hired to continue operations during the strike stay on as permanent employees. But by the time a strike vote is taken, after months, and sometimes years, of exhausting all avenues provided in the collective bargaining process, workers usually feel they have absolutely no choice. A strike may be the only option they have to resolve differences with their employer.

In my 27 years working for the former SNET/SBC/AT&T and currently Frontier, we've had a month long strike in 1998, and much smaller informational strikes a few times. When the other party isn't bargaining in good faith, or not even coming to the table at all, a strike may ultimately become the workers only recourse. Not their first option, but the option that has to be utilized when no other choices are left. Nobody wakes up and says, "What a fantastic day, week or month to strike". Losing pay with no alternative financial avenues, especially with a family at home, utility bills, car payments, and the endless other monetary obligations is a frightening experience, one I would never wish on anyone.

SB 938 is not a measure designed to enrich workers. Instead, it is designed to avoid labor disputes, and if an employer understands that striking workers will be eligible to collect unemployment benefits after a two-week waiting period, likely resulting in a small increase to their unemployment insurance rates, they will be more likely to bargain in good faith to avoid a work stoppage altogether.

Unionized workplaces raise standards for all workers. When striking workers can access unemployment benefits to help sustain themselves and their families, it empowers them to advocate for protections that benefit all workers, and ultimately creates a better working environment in the State of Connecticut.

New York and New Jersey already allow this. New York reduced its waiting period from 7 weeks to 2 weeks in 2020. New Jersey has a 30-day waiting period but is considering legislation to reduce it to 2 weeks in order to mirror New York's law. SB 938 follows the example set by our neighboring states. We urge the Committee to support this bill.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.